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SERVICE DATE - OCTOBER 26, 1998
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB-31 (SUB-NO.33)

Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated
--Abandonment--
Rail Line in Macomb and Oakland Counties,MI

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated (GTW) has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon its railroad line located between MP 19.5 (in Washington) and MP 37.7 (in Pontiac), a distance of 18.2 miles in Macomb and Oakland Counties, Michigan on the so-called Romeo Subdivision. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the application is approved, the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LINE

In its application, GTW states that the line traverses relatively flat land in two counties, and runs in an east-west direction (MP 19.5 at the easterly end, and MP 37.7 at the westerly end) through both rural and urban areas. The right-of-way is 100 feet wide in most places. The line has 20 public and 3 private road grade crossings. Movements over 15 of the 23 grade crossings are restricted due to rusty rail conditions.

GTW further states that there are six customers on the line, however, only five are active: Washington Elevator Company (MP 20.0)(Dry Fertilizer/in-bound), Letica Corporation (MP 28.5) (Plastics/in-bound), Wickes Lumber Company (MP 29.04)(Lumber/in-bound), Church & Church, Inc.(using team track at MP 31.65)(Lumber/in-bound), and Hubert Distributors, Inc. (MP 33.85)(Beer/in- and out-bound). The only other customer located on the line is Custom Paper Group (CPG) at MP 26.08. CPG has not received any traffic since January 1997, and its side track agreement with GTW was terminated effective June 20, 1998. Traffic levels on the line have ranged between 175 and 219 carloads over the past 2 ½ years.

GTW has not performed any maintenance on the line in over two years. This has resulted in its classification as excepted track. GTW further states that the substantial rehabilitation costs required to maintain the Line at excepted track status are sizeable. GTW concludes that the volume of traffic on the line and revenues derived from it are insufficient to warrant the rehabilitation expenditures and therefore continued operation of the line is no longer economically feasible.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The railroad has submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have investigated the record in this proceeding. Also, we have consulted with appropriate agencies and individuals to verify the railroad's report and to obtain additional information and comments regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed abandonment. Contacts have included City of Pontiac Planning Department, Southeast Michigan Council of Government, Office of National Geodetic Survey, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Services, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5 and the Michigan Historical Center, State Historic Preservation Office.

CONDITIONS

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) has identified thirty-three geodetic markers along the rail line and requests 90 days notice to plan relocation of any markers which may be disturbed or destroyed. Therefore, we recommend that the following condition be imposed on any decision granting abandonment authority: **Grand Trunk Western Railroad Incorporated shall consult with the National Geodetic Survey and provide NGS with 90 day notice prior to disturbing or destroying any geodetic markers.**

The Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer has identified the Bridge located at MP 34.57 as eligible for the National Registry of Historic Places. **We recommend that a condition be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority requiring the railroad to retain its interest in and take no steps to alter the historic integrity of the Bridge located at MP 34.57 until completion of the Section 106 process of the National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f.**

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, and subject to the recommended conditions, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Alternatives to the proposed abandonment would include denial (and therefore no change in operations), discontinuance of service without abandonment, and continued operation by another operator. In any of these cases, the existing quality of the human environment and energy consumption should not be affected.

PUBLIC USE

Following abandonment and salvage of the rail line, the right-of-way may be suitable for other public use. GTW has searched the deeds for the right-of-way property and is not aware of any restriction on the title to the property, including any reversionary interest, that would affect the transfer of title or the use of property for other than rail purposes. A request containing the requisite four-part showing for imposition of a public use condition (49 CFR 1152.28) must be filed with the Board and served on the railroad within the time specified in the Federal Register notice.

TRAILS USE

A request for a certificate of interim trail use (CITU) is due to the Board, with a copy to the railroad, within 30 days of filing of the application. Nevertheless, the Board will accept late-filed requests as long as it retains jurisdiction to do so in a particular case. This request must comply with the Board's rules for use of rights-of-way as trails (49 CFR 1152.29).

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Scott Decker, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-31 (Sub No.33) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Scott Decker at (202) 565-1531.

Date made available to the public: October 21, 1998.

Comment due date: November 20, 1998.

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

PLEASE SCAN MAP